



STORAGE FAQ

Q Is there any advantage to using FireWire 400 (also known as iLink and IEEE 1394a) to connect my external hard disks instead of USB2?

A USB2 is faster than FireWire 400 on paper, but external hard disks that use FireWire 400 tend to be faster in practice. Given that FireWire 400 hard disks can cost as much as £50-70 more than USB2 hard disks, the extra speed isn't a particularly compelling reason to buy one for everyday tasks such as storing MP3s or backing up your Word documents. FireWire 400 is a better option for tasks that benefit from the extra speed, such as video or sound editing.

If you need to share files with computers that have FireWire 400 ports but no USB2 ports, such as older Apple Macs, a hard disk with FireWire 400 ports instead of or as well as USB2 ports would be ideal.

If you need loads of external hard disks but don't fancy spending money on USB2 hubs, FireWire 400 hard disks may be preferable. You can daisy-chain them together by plugging one hard disk into the back of the other, so there's no need for a hub.

For most PC owners, though, USB2 is more than fast enough and the drives are a lot cheaper.

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REVIEW PORTABLE EXTERNAL DISK

BUFFALO USB 2.0 External Portable Hard Drive with USB Power Booster

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £70 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.nickknows.com

DETAILS www.buffalo-technology.com

Buffalo's range of portable hard disks includes this 40GB model. It uses a notebook-sized 2½" hard disk, so the device is small enough to slip easily into a bag. It also features a USB Power Booster attachment that's designed to help PCs with low-powered USB ports.

The biggest problem with USB hard disks is that it takes a lot of power to spin up and mount them, but after that they need relatively little power to keep running. The Power Booster is a capacitor that builds up enough charge to spin up and mount a hard disk by drawing power from your USB port. Once the disk is spinning, the drive reverts to standard USB power as normal.

None of *Shopper's* test PCs had any problems mounting the Buffalo hard disk or reading and writing data to it. The manual states that the Power Booster is not recommended for use with USB hubs, which traditionally have low- or under-powered USB ports, so it's difficult to determine how useful the Power Booster attachment actually is. It's also flimsily attached, which doesn't inspire much confidence.

The disk performed respectably. In our large files test, the drive wrote data at 25.44MB/s and read at 28MB/s; in our small files test, it wrote at



8.90MB/s and read at 10.41MB/s. This is average for a 2½" hard disk, although LaCie's Mobile Hard Drive (*Shopper* June 2005) beat it in all but the large files write test. This is surprising given that the Buffalo's hard disk spins at 5,400rpm compared with the LaCie's 4,200rpm.

The LaCie Mobile is not only faster than the Buffalo but is also more attractive and it provides 60GB of storage for just £12 more. Unless you've experienced particular problems with the power supply from your PC's USB ports, we recommend LaCie's Mobile over Buffalo's portable disk.

Alan Lu

✓ Lightweight

✗ Flimsy build; not suitable for use with USB hubs

SPECIFICATIONS 40GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed, USB powered.
Part code HD-PH40U2/BST

HOTLIST DVD WRITER

NEC ND-3540A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £31 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.girotech.co.uk

DETAILS www.nec.co.uk

Although it doesn't have support for DVD-RAM, NEC's ND-3540A is the fastest of the latest-generation DVD writers. Impressive writing specifications are backed up by excellent performance. It took only 19 minutes to fill a +R double-layer disc and just over 20 minutes to fill a -R dual-layer disc, which for these 8.5GB discs amounts to nearly ½GB/minute write speed. At this price, you won't find a faster writer.

SPECIFICATIONS 16X DVD+R, 16X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+R DL, 6X DVD-R DL, 48X CD-R, 32X CD-RW, 16X DVD-ROM, 48X CD-ROM. **Part code** ND-3540A



HOTLIST PORTABLE HARD DISK

WESTERN DIGITAL Passport 80GB

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £97 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.wdc.com

Western Digital's rubber-bottomed Passport is an excellent portable disk. It's a little bigger than a PDA and weighs just 238g, so it's easy to carry around. Inside is a 2½" hard disk that provides 80GB of storage. It connects via USB Hi-Speed and provides the kind of transfer speeds usual for such a disk; large files transfer at around 22MB/s and small files at 7MB/s. It's ideal as a second notebook hard disk or as portable file storage.

SPECIFICATIONS 80GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed interface, USB powered. **Part code** WDXML800UETE



HOTLIST INTERNAL HARD DISK

SAMSUNG SpinPoint SP2504C

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £79 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.komplett.co.uk

DETAILS www.samsung.com

Samsung's SpinPoint SP2504C was easily the best hard disk in our Labs test (*Shopper* September 2005). It combines good value with cutting-edge technology. Its 250GB of storage is accessed through a SATA II interface with Native Command Queuing at a maximum transfer rate of 300MB/s. If you're looking for more internal storage and you have a free SATA connector, this is the best drive to buy.

SPECIFICATIONS 3½" internal hard disk, 250GB capacity, 232GB formatted capacity (NTFS), SATA 300 interface, 7,200rpm spindle speed, 8MB cache. **Part code** SP2504C

